

2005 NEBRASKA AMERICORPS APPLICATION



PART 1

Introduction & Key Information

Corporation for
**NATIONAL &
COMMUNITY
SERVICE** 

**Nebraska Volunteer
Service Commission** 
serve your neighbor • serve your community • serve your country

The following oath, recited by each AmeriCorps member at the beginning of their year of service, captures the spirit of AmeriCorps:



The AmeriCorps Pledge

*I will get things done for America – to make our people safer,
smarter and healthier.*

I will bring Americans together to strengthen our communities.

Faced with apathy, I will take action.

Faced with conflict, I will seek common ground.

Faced with adversity, I will persevere.

I will carry this commitment with me this year and beyond.

I am an AmeriCorps member, and I will get things done.





November 2004

Greetings,

Welcome to AmeriCorps—a vibrant way to meet critical community needs through citizen service.

Thank you for your interest. Your interest and enthusiasm are shared by our leaders. The President and Congress are committed to the success of national service and have recommended major appropriations for 2005. In addition, the President has, through his USA Freedom Corps initiative, called on all Americans to serve the equivalent of two years, or 4,000 hours, over their lifetime. Congress, through the Citizen Service Act of 2002, and the Strengthen AmeriCorps Program Act of 2003, has displayed leadership in proposing ways to further strengthen AmeriCorps.

Through this Request for Proposals (RFP), community organizations throughout Nebraska can seek funding to expand or create high-impact service opportunities to benefit our communities.

Please be sure to carefully read all application instructions, and note pertinent due dates.

The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission (NVSC) is committed to providing the most current information available to all applicants. Please check our website, www.nol.org/home/NVSC, frequently to assure you are informed of any changes.

Some key components of the application process are:

- All applications are due **JANUARY 3, 2005** and must be submitted electronically to the commission using E-grants, a web-based system;
- The living allowance for full-time AmeriCorps members is \$10,600 annually;
- The maximum share the federal government will support via AmeriCorps grants is \$12,400 per full-time member;
- Applicants are required to include at least three performance measures which highlight the qualitative and quantitative success of your efforts. Additional performance measures are welcome.

The staff at NVSC remains committed to providing you the resources to develop a high-impact service program that meets Nebraska's needs. Please contact us to assist you as you review these documents and prepare your application.

Sincerely,

Debra Hartmann
Executive Director



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Background

General Information on AmeriCorps

Programs supported through this RFP are part of the AmeriCorps National Service network that provides full- and part-time opportunities for participants to serve their communities and address local education, environmental, public safety, homeland security, and other human needs.

AmeriCorps continues a long tradition of governmental initiatives that encourage and reward service – programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Montgomery GI Bill, and the Peace Corps.

AmeriCorps funds and supports quality programs that get things done, encourage responsibility, expand opportunities and strengthen communities. AmeriCorps members undertake service that has a maximum impact on our nation's communities and could not be provided without the service of AmeriCorps and the volunteers they generate.

Entities that sponsor AmeriCorps programs recruit, select, and train their own AmeriCorps members; design and operate their local programs; and are responsible for providing funds and other resources to match the federal funds they receive through their AmeriCorps grant.

In return for their service, AmeriCorps participants, known as members, receive a modest living allowance and an education award that can be used towards existing college loans or to pay for future educational costs.

Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission

The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission (NVSC) promotes service and volunteerism opportunities throughout the State of Nebraska and is the state entity charged with overseeing the implementation of AmeriCorps in our state.

NVSC is dedicated to uniting individuals in service to their communities and achieving demonstrable results by addressing Nebraska's unmet human, educational, environmental, public safety, and homeland security needs.

NVSC's goals are to:

- Encourage Nebraska's strong ethic of civic responsibility and rich tradition of community involvement;
- Ensure a serious role for service and volunteerism in meeting Nebraska's educational, environmental, health, public safety, and homeland security challenges;
- Connect Nebraskans from diverse backgrounds and experiences to find solutions to problems together; and,
- Nurture the growth and emergence of Nebraska's next generation of community and professional leaders.

Since its inception a decade ago, NVSC has secured and disseminated more than \$10 million in AmeriCorps funding from the federal Corporation for National and Community Service to local and statewide public and nonprofit agencies that have created opportunities for more than 1,500 AmeriCorps members to serve in the state. NVSC provides AmeriCorps programs with training



and ongoing technical assistance to support the development and maintenance of high quality AmeriCorps programs. Each program works closely with an NVSC program officer to ensure progress towards program objectives, a meaningful service experience for AmeriCorps members, and compliance with applicable regulations.

Beyond its grant making responsibilities, NVSC promotes volunteerism throughout the state and honors those who serve. We recognize individuals and groups who are making a difference in Nebraska. Throughout the year, we accept nominations for the First Lady's Awards on Community Service, which are awarded at the Commission's flagship event The Governor's Conference on Volunteerism and Community Service. We also facilitate the quarterly Governor's Points of Light Awards.

Eligibility Standards

Local or statewide public or private non-profit organizations, including labor, faith-based and secular community organizations; institutions of higher education; subdivisions of the state (e.g., cities, counties); Indian tribes; partnerships or consortia consisting of the foregoing, are eligible to apply for funding.

Any organization described in Section 501 (c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, 26 U.S.C. 501 (c)(4) that engages in lobbying activities is not eligible to apply, serve as a host site for member placements, or act in any type of supervisory role in the program.

Applicants must be able to show that their programs or the services being offered provide a direct benefit that the community values. In addition, they must show that existing funds or volunteers do not already provide these services and that program activities will not duplicate the routine functions of workers and will not displace paid workers. More comprehensive details on member eligibility, benefits, and reporting and evaluation are contained later in this RFP.

- **New Applicants.** NVSC encourages the development of innovative programs operated by organizations and partnerships new to the AmeriCorps family and in communities that have not previously accessed AmeriCorps resources

New applicants are defined as those in which the applicant has not previously operated an AmeriCorps program, or in which one or more of the following applies:

- Change in legal applicant
 - Significant change in the collaborative partners in the grant; and/or
 - Change in the member service activities and objectives of the partnership
- **Continuation Funding: existing AmeriCorps programs.** Current AmeriCorps*State and national competitive grantees must, by law, submit applications if they wish to be considered for future AmeriCorps funding. Existing programs that are finishing their third year of a grant award must submit a *new* application. Programs in the first or second year of the grant award will submit a *continuation* application.



Programs must assure that all WBRS-related reporting activity, including enrollment of members and entry of service hours, is current at the time of submission. In addition, existing programs are advised that previous site visit reports, program progress reports, financial reports, WBRS documentation, as well as member recruitment and retention rates will be reviewed as part of the selection process. Systems for improving known deficiencies in any of these areas should be addressed in the program narrative

Continuation programs must also submit a summary describing program impact and accomplishments of the current grant. If your program is in its final year of a grant cycle and are applying for new funding, your application must include a summary describing your program's impact and accomplishments for the previous three years of Corporation funding. More information regarding these requirements is included later in the RFP in the *Instructions and Forms* section.

Copies of any program evaluations completed in the last four years must also be submitted.

Regarding program expansion, applicants are advised that expansion opportunities in the second and third year of a grant period are unpredictable and may be extremely limited. As a result, applicants should not expect to expand program operations in the second or third year of the grant period, unless doing so will bring the program up to a minimum FTE count of 6. Existing recompeting programs that wish to expand their program should propose to do so through this application.

Organizations which sponsor current/former AmeriCorps programs which are out of compliance may apply, but their application will not be forwarded to the Corporation for National Service for funding unless and until all compliance issues are addressed.

Nebraska & National Funding Priorities

NVSC establishes funding priorities for each grant process. These priorities reflect those areas in which NVSC seeks to develop and continue programming.

NVSC funding priorities for the 2005 AmeriCorps grant making process are:

- ***Homeland Security***-- programs that support the engagement of volunteers in preventing, preparing for and responding to disasters and other emergencies, including acts of terrorism. The best defense is a strongly interconnected community that is able to handle a disaster or an act of terrorism. A connected community is a safer community. Local communities are in the best position to determine appropriate strategies for integrating service and volunteering into homeland security efforts. For more information about Citizen Corps, visit its website at: www.citizencorps.gov. Descriptions of homeland security programs funded by the Corporation in prior years are available on the website: www.nationalservice.org.



While many of the day to day activities may be similar, homeland security initiatives differ from other public safety, public health, and disaster preparedness & relief programs in their focus on preparing communities to be able to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, and respond to acts of terrorism or other disasters that breach the security and safety of citizens. Applications incorporating Homeland Security components should include evidence of organizing, training, and preparing people for homeland security disasters or emergencies.

We encourage you to get involved in a local Citizen Corps Council, partnering with as many organizations and groups as possible within your community. Where such councils do not formally exist, consider helping organize a Council.

Other examples of Homeland Security initiatives include:

- organizing and registering local Neighborhood Watch groups;
- connecting and organizing volunteers to participate with emergency personnel preventive trainings such as VIPS (Volunteers in Police Service) and CERT (Community Emergency Response Teams);
- coordinating participation in community drills responding to terrorist or emergency threat;
- developing additional community readiness activities that may address "invisible" needs within a community;
- surveying special needs or ethnic minority populations to identify and meet gaps in the system of disaster response;
- surveying community assets that can be used for shelter and liabilities that compromise safety;
- developing materials, identifying resources, and educating the public to build awareness of and readiness for both natural disasters and intentional criminal/terrorist attacks;
- assessing community awareness and preparedness of appropriate protocol for emergencies and for volunteering;
- mobilizing volunteers to assist first responders such as police departments, fire departments, and other agencies involved in public security;
- providing support for professional or volunteer fire departments, including a range of administrative duties, fire prevention and outreach, public education, and emergency response; and
- organizing, conducting, and supporting community-based immunization programs related to bio-terrorism public health concerns.

Activities that specifically address the concerns of your target population only, must include how the activities fit within the "bigger picture" of your community's safety plan.

- **Intermediaries**—NVSC encourages programs that provide AmeriCorps resources to enhance and expand the capacity of grassroots organizations (secular and faith-based) to deliver services that meet critical community needs. The NVSC is interested in seeing



applications from organizations (national, regional, state, or local organizations) that serve as the legal applicant and agree to provide the technical and financial support to assist grassroots and other community organizations that do not have the capacity to perform these functions for an AmeriCorps grant. This most often occurs through having members in service at grassroots and other compatible partner organizations.

- **Cost Per Member:** NVSC is interested in maximizing the impact of funds used to support AmeriCorps programming and in encouraging community support of AmeriCorps initiatives. As a result, it identifies a reduced federal share of the per-member cost as a priority. Applications which propose a cost per member at least 10% lower than the maximum federal share [\$12,400 per full-time member] will be viewed favorably in the event of a tie in the scoring of applications.

To encourage applicants to address NVSC priorities, in reviewing proposals the NVSC will award up to 5 points per priority to each proposal which addresses one or more priorities. These points are in addition to the conventional scoring process. No more than 10 “priority points” will be added to any one proposal. Although applicants are asked to self-identify aspects of the priorities they address in their applications, the NVSC staff will make final decisions regarding the provision of “priority points”.

As mentioned, the Corporation for National & Community Service also establishes national funding priorities. These priorities complement the Nebraska priorities and are of special relevance for programs of the size, scope and experience that make them likely candidates for consideration in the national competitive funding pool. The following is the set of priorities that the Corporation will consider in making funding selections.

- (A) national service programs that serve or involve children and youth;
- (B) national service programs that support the efforts of civic, community, education, and faith-based organizations to solve local programs;
- (C) national service programs that promote the effective involvement of volunteers;
- (D) national service programs that build the capacity of community organizations;
- (E) national service programs that carry out literacy and tutoring activities;
- (F) innovative national service programs;
- (G) national service programs that are well established in one or more States at the time of the application and are proposed to be expanded to additional States;
- (H) grant programs in support of other national service programs if the grant programs are to be conducted by nonprofit organizations with a demonstrated and extensive expertise in the provision of services to meet human, educational, environmental, or public safety needs; and
- (I) professional corps programs.

The following is a list of additional considerations NVSC and Corporation reviewers will give to applications in making funding selections:

- programs that are high-quality and have the potential to be replicated by programs in



other areas, and that can sustain themselves or the service activities with other support when the grant period ends;

- programs that collaborate with or propose to foster Federal Work Study students in community service who are hosted by educational institutions;
- a wide range of program designs and approaches to community service that meet community needs;
- programs that are geographically diverse and include projects to be conducted in those urban and rural areas in a state with the highest rates of poverty;
- programs in areas affected by military downsizing; and
- programs that demonstrate they can effectively develop and administer an AmeriCorps program with proper supervision, monitoring, evaluation, and financial controls.

In addition, we seek a participant pool that includes young and older adults, a balance of individuals who have not attended college and those with college education experience, approximately equal numbers of men and women, individuals with disabilities and individuals of all races, ethnicities, faiths, and economic backgrounds.

NVSC's portfolio of programs includes those that address state and national, as well as local, priorities. NVSC advises applicants that well-designed programs focused on local needs are more competitive than those that affix program design elements for the sake of meeting state or national priorities, thus attempting to increase the applicant's competitiveness.

Funding Parameters

Types of Grants Available. NVSC's current portfolio contains operating, education award only and planning AmeriCorps grants. Operating grants range from \$49,600 to more than \$533,200 with an average grant award size of \$207,708. In addition, NVSC facilitates two Education Awards only programs.

- **Operating Grants:** AmeriCorps funding comes to Nebraska through two separate funding streams – formula and competitive funds. NVSC receives formula funds from the Corporation through a population-based allocation. Formula funds are generally awarded to less experienced programs or first-time applicants. **Generally speaking, the Commission expects formula programs, at the end of the three-year grant period, to be sufficiently strong to be sustained without AmeriCorps funds or to be able to move to the Competitive funding stream.** However, the Commission will consider exceptions on a case-by-case basis. Competitive funds are awarded through a national competition to programs that have competed successfully at both the state and federal levels. Programs funded through the national competition are typically veteran programs, are larger in size, and/or have particularly innovative program designs.

This RFP covers both competitive and formula funding streams. The Commission will review each applicant and determine the most appropriate funding stream. We expect to award both competitive and formula funds but will not be sure of actual available funding



until the Corporation announces its final appropriation from Congress through its approval of the Federal Budget Act.

- **Education Awards Only Grants:** The applicant absorbs the vast majority of operational costs and the members receive no living allowance. Members do receive educational awards at the end of the term of service. In most education award programs, the members receive a salary/stipend from another source. Minimal operational funds are available as Fixed Price Awards. The Award is calculated by multiplying the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) AmeriCorps members by a maximum amount of \$400. For example, a successful applicant requesting 25 FTE AmeriCorps members could receive no more than \$10,000. Please see other parts of this RFP for more information on Education Award Only grants. *Programs may include Education Award Only members as part of the member mix in an operational grant featuring members receiving a living allowance.*
- **Planning Grants:** Planning grants are awarded in amounts up to \$20,000 for a period of up to 6 months to bring small community- or faith-based organizations to the verge of implementation so that they may compete successfully for operating assistance in the following grant cycle. All planning grants are subject to a minimum 33% cost share. Please see later parts of this RFP for more information on Planning Grants.

Scope of Awards. The Corporation for National & Community Service annually determines the maximum potential amount to be funded. This is done on a per member basis. For 2005-2006, this figure is \$12,400 per member. Thus a program with 10 FTE AmeriCorps members could not receive more than \$124,000 (10 x \$12,400) through this RFP for an AmeriCorps program. There is no maximum program size.

Minimum Program Size. In order to make a substantive impact on identified community needs, NVSC requires that applicants request no fewer than **10 full-time equivalent (FTE) AmeriCorps members** as part of their application. Exceptions to this policy will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, with compelling justification provided by the applicant in the program narrative. It is unlikely that the NVSC will fund applications for fewer than 6 FTE AmeriCorps members unless federal funding is inadequate. Programs in the NVSC's current portfolio range from 4 to 43 FTE members with an average program size of 16.75 FTE members. The NVSC Education Award Only portfolio has two programs with 7 and 25 FTE members.

Grant Period. Grants awarded through this selection process will support programming beginning in the fall of 2005. The Corporation and NVSC generally provide funding for a three-year grant period provided there is demonstrated success toward achieving program objectives and an application for continuation funding. *Applications for 2005-2006 must include proposed activities and a detailed proposed budget for the first year of operation and program objectives for a one-year period.*

Allowable Costs and Matching Funds Requirement. AmeriCorps grants provide funding in support of member support costs and program operating expenses. AmeriCorps funding can be used for up to:



- 85% of member support costs. This includes the member living allowance, FICA, worker's compensation, and health insurance; and,
- 67% of other program operating costs. This includes program staff, internal evaluation, administration, and other operating costs.

All other costs must be provided for by the grantee in the form of matching funds. Minimum matching funds requirements for programs are:

- 15% of member support costs. These must be cash and non-federal funds; and
- 33% of other program operating costs. This may come in the form of federal or non-federal funds OR in-kind.

More information regarding matching funds requirements, including sustainability plans, can be found later in this RFP.

Application Essentials

Due Date.

All applications must be submitted electronically via the eGrants process to the Commission by 5:00 p.m. CST on January 3, 2005. Hard copies will not be accepted, except for submission of the Evaluation, Audit, and Sustainability Plan documents. This date applies to operating, education award only, and planning grant proposals. Applications received after the deadline will be disqualified.

Utilizing eGrants.

Contact the Commission office as soon as possible, at (402) 471-6225 or 1-800-291-8911 to allow Commission staff to provide you with instructions needed to obtain an E-grants login ID.

The NVSC strongly encourages you to create an eGrants account and begin your application at least 3 weeks prior to the final submission deadline. This will allow you time to address technical issues prior to the deadline.

- We suggest you first prepare and save your application as a word processing document prior to inputting it into eGrants, then copy and paste the document into eGrants.
- Use only uppercase letters for all section headings and other information you would like to highlight in your narrative. **Bold face, bullets, underlines, or other types of formatting, charts, diagrams, and tables will not copy into eGrants. Do not use any of these in your application.**
- Remember to follow the character limits listed in the narrative section below. We use character limits rather than page limits because of the structure of eGrants. Characters are letters, punctuation, and spaces included in your document. Your word processing software can provide a character count.



- Grant applications must provide a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number. The DUNS number is known as the universal identifier and helps the federal government improve statistical reports on federal grants and cooperative agreements. The DUNS number will not replace the EIN. DUNS numbers may be obtained at no cost by calling the DUNS number request line at (866) 705-5711. There is a DUNS number field in the Organization section in eGrants.

eGrants & Technical Assistance Training

Commission staff will conduct E-grants training sessions. E-grants training is MANDATORY for new applicants and recommended for all applicants. Please visit the Commission website at www.nol.org/home/NVSC for the latest information on locations and times

eGrants training will be held in Lincoln on December 13. **This training is recommended for all and mandatory for those applicants who have not submitted a proposal to the Commission via eGrants previously.** Contact Karen Whitson of the Commission at (402) 471-6228 or karen.whitson@hhss.ne.gov to enroll.

An interactive Technical Assistance video conference will be conducted on November 19 from 9:30 – 11:00 am CST. Sites are available in Ainsworth, Columbus, Grand Island, Lincoln, Omaha, McCook, North Platte, and Scottsbluff. Please contact Janet Schmidt at (402) 471-6225 or janet.schmidt@hhss.ne.gov **NO LATER THAN Monday, November 15**, for specific site locations and to enroll.

Please call the Commission office at (402) 471-6225 or 1-800-291-8911 or check our website at www.nol.org/home/NVSC for the most up to date information about these workshops.

Distribution of Application Materials.

NVSC Staff will distribute packets to known potential applicants and others upon request. We encourage you to visit the Commission's website to download application materials at www.nol.org/home/NVSC.

Announcement of Funding Availability.

The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission notifies the public of the Request for Proposal by publishing a notice on the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission website at www.nol.org/home/NVSC and in the Lincoln Journal Star and Omaha World Herald.

Governing Regulations.

The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission grants these funds in accordance with Nebraska State Law, the Uniform Grants Management Code, and the Uniform Administrative Requirements for State and Local Governments (OMB Circular A-102) using competitive negotiation. Unlike formal advertising (i.e., sealed bids) cost is not the only factor evaluated.



Grant Review Process & Notification

Grant review will be conducted one to two weeks following the applications submission deadline. Those reviewing the grants include members of the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission, NVSC staff, and peer reviewers. Decisions of the Grant Review Committee are forwarded to the full Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission Staff for approval before the decisions are forwarded to the Corporation for National and Community Service.

Successful applicants will be notified by telephone with written notification following. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified in writing.

We frequently receive far more applications than we can award. We select applications using an extensive, multi-stage process that may include reviews by state commissions, peer review panels, and Corporation staff. During the peer review process we use outside experts including community service practitioners, educators, administrators, former national service participants, and specialists in the areas of environment, public safety, education, homeland security, and other human needs to evaluate the quality of applications. If you are a current AmeriCorps grantee, please **do not assume** that peer reviewers are familiar with your grant program. During the staff review we determine the relative quality among applications but also consider statutory funding requirements. We may conduct clarifying interviews in person or through conference calls.

Review Criteria

We use the following criteria to determine quality and select programs and projects that will receive funding. Additional consideration is given to the Executive Summary, the Summary of Accomplishments and Outcomes (for continuation and recompeting programs), and the Sustainability Plan.

The bullets under each sub-heading describe what we consider important and what you should include in your application narrative. Please use them as sub-headings in crafting your narrative.

Program Design includes three sub-categories and represents 60 percent of the basis we use to evaluate and select each program. The sub-categories of Needs and Service Activities, Strengthening Communities, and Participant Development are related and are therefore grouped in a single Program Design criteria. The Corporation will give equal importance to these subcategories when judging applications.

Program Design (60%)

- Needs and Service Activities
 - Well-documented compelling community need
 - Well-designed activities with appropriate performance measures
 - Well-defined roles for participants that lead to measurable outcomes or impact
 - Previous history of accomplishments in the proposed activity areas
 - Effective involvement of target community in planning and implementation
 - Ability to provide or secure effective technical assistance



- Member Development
 - Effective plans for recruiting, developing, training, supervising, and recognizing participants
 - Well-designed activities that promote an ethic of service and civic responsibility
 - Well-designed plan to engage participants in high-quality service learning as defined by the Corporation. [This is only a scoring criterion for Learn & Serve programming.]
- Strengthening Communities
 - Developing community resources, including recruiting and managing volunteers, with appropriate performance measures
 - Strong community partnerships, including well-defined roles for faith- or community-based organizations
 - Plans & potential for sustainability
 - Enhanced capacity building of organizations and institutions
 - Bring together people of different backgrounds

Organizational Capacity (25%)

- Ability to provide sound programmatic and fiscal oversight
- Sound track record of accomplishment as an organization
- Well-defined roles for staff and administrators
- Well-designed plan or systems for self-assessment, evaluation, and continuous improvement

Budget/Cost Effectiveness (15%)

- Commitment of applicant organization or host agency to securing resources, i.e., non-federal support, for program implementation or sustainability
- Adequate budget to support program design
- Cost-effective within program guidelines

Execution of Cooperative Agreements

For each successful applicant, when funding for successful applications has been secured from the Corporation for National and Community Service, a Cooperative Agreements [which serves as the contract for the AmeriCorps grant] will be executed by the Executive Director of NVSC and the authorized official with the grantee organization.

